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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANAA 002790

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [YM](#)

SUBJECT: YEMEN ASKS US TO STAY OUT OF KHAIWANI CASE

REF: SANAA 02725

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas C. Krajeski for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. At November 1 meeting, Deputy Foreign Minister Dhabbi expressed concern that the US plans to join European missions in criticizing the ROYG publicly for the detention of journalist al-Khaiwani. Ambassador responded that no such discussion had taken place and the US would not at this time comment on the case. Ambassador confirmed that the US was following the case closely, and was concerned about its implications for freedom of the press. Ambassador noted the larger context, specifically the ROYG's planned prisoner release during Ramadan. End Summary.

12. (C) Deputy Foreign Minister Dhabbi requested a meeting with Ambassador to deliver a message from President Saleh. Saleh was concerned, said the DFM, about the possibility that the US would join with the Europeans in criticizing the ROYG's conviction and imprisonment of "as-Shura" editor Abdulkarim al-Khaiwani (reftel). Dhabbi met earlier the same day with three European Ambassadors who, according to the DFM, reported that a statement was "still under discussion."

13. (C) Ambassador told Dhabbi he had not yet been approached by European missions, and was not planning to speak out on the case at this time. Nevertheless, he did not rule out such a move in the future. He stressed that both the Embassy and Washington were following the Khaiwani case closely and were concerned about deteriorating press freedoms in Yemen. Ambassador said the ROYG had been developing a good record in the region on press freedoms and expressed his hope that this did not represent a negative trend.

14. (C) Dhabbi explained that Khaiwani was not in prison for exercising free speech but for provoking the rebellion of Al-Houthi in Sa'ada, and for encouraging social and religious divisions in the country. Yemen could not risk a threat to its unity as in 1994, said Dhabbi, and did not need the encouragement of any new forms of Islam. Dhabbi also said that it was the courts which imprisoned Khaiwani and not the government. He pointed to the behavior of the U.S. media during the war in Iraq, suggesting that the Yemeni press should also support its President during times of war.

15. (C) This case, Dhabbi claimed, has received undo attention because Khaiwani is a member of the media. Ambassador stressed that the US supports the unity of Yemen and its right to defend itself, but that there is a larger context. The ROYG, said Ambassador, is currently weighing releasing security prisoners to which the US has serious objections. The USG, he continued, is invested in the growth of democracy in Yemen and press freedoms are a big part of this effort. Perhaps, said Ambassador, Khaiwani would be a more appropriate recipient of a compassionate release than the known al-Qaida associates currently on the list.

KRAJESKI